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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine if a 1-year structured social skills program would improve academic and interpersonal skills and attendance in young African American males. On a pre-assessment inventory, study participants, 33 fourth grade boys, demonstrated a variety of poor social skills such as poor attendance, poor interpersonal skills, stress, poor organization and study skills, destructive and aggressive behaviors. The social skills program activities included techniques for improving bonding, attention, sense of belonging, group skills, confidence, motivation, caring, problem solving, and behavior problems. Teachers were instructed to model identified behaviors and to ascertain whether the boys understood or could imitate the behaviors. Generally, most of the study participants were pleased with their progress and wanted to continue in the program. Both teachers and parents were pleased with the significant gains that students made in improving academic and interpersonal skills. Findings suggest that there is a vital need to teach social skills to African-American males at an early age, and that systematic planning between home and school can compensate for deficits in social skills development in African-American males. The project appeared to significantly change the negative and aggressive behaviors of the boys, to expand their self-images, and to improve grades in reading and mathematics. Recommendations for strengthening the program include: improving guidelines for identifying and selecting participants; providing inservice training for parents and teachers; integrating the program more completely throughout the school; and evaluating the long term effects of the program. (Contains 22 references.) (ND)

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between social skills development, academic achievement and interpersonal relations of African-American Males.

*George Taylor

A structured social skills program was developed for African American Males. The study was designed to improve academic and interpersonal skills. Thirty three (33) boys were selected to participate in grade 4. Boys selected were free of serious mental and physical conditions.

The structured program was conducted over a one year period by teachers and parents. Findings indicated that the project boys showed significant improvement in interpersonal and academic skills. All measures were significant at the .01 level or greater specific recommendations were made for strengthening the program.

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between social skills development, academic achievement and interpersonal relations of African American males.

The severity and complexity of Urban Education problems have become so widely publicized that their complexity may be considered common knowledge. Many deprived Black male children live in sub-standard environments where they are denied appropriate mental, physical and social stimulation. These conditions impede normal development in all areas of functioning. (Matsueda, 1987; Butler, 1989, Hatch, Thomas, Gardner, and Howard, 1988, Tomlinson, 1988).

The ability of low achieving Black male children to function satisfactorily in social groups, and to maintain dispositions, habits, and attitudes customarily associated with character and personality is usually below expected levels set by the school. They are more likely than other children to be rejected by their peers; have fewer less rigid controls over their impulses, have learned hostile and destructive patterns of behavior, and often seem unable to respond to traditional classroom instruction. As with all children, Black male children imitate behavioral techniques from their environments (Hillard, 1989; Taylor, 1992).

Research findings have clearly demonstrated that diverse groups of children, such as young Black males, are at risk for developing appropriate interpersonal skills. Lack of this development may lead to feelings of rejection and isolation in a classroom setting. There is also ample evidence to suggest that children's social difficulties may emanate from vastly different deficit areas. These deficit areas must be identified and remediated during the early years. Schools must design direct and immediate intervention programs which will permit these young Black males to experience success (Butler, 1988; Hillard, 1989; Kagan, 1989; Bradley, 1989; Diggory, 1990; Foster, 1986; Deal, 1990; Holland, 1987; Ayers, 1989).

Studies have consistently shown that negative behaviors are learned behaviors which children imitate from their environments. These behaviors manifest themselves in hostile and destructive patterns of behavior, which frequently cannot be controlled by the schools, thus creating conflict and tension between children, parents, and school (Mastsueda, 1987; Gibbs, 1988;).

Harris (1992) findings support the aforementioned research, he concluded the many African-American males may have developed or adapted alternative ways and styles of coping with problems in their neighborhoods. These behavioral styles are frequently in conflict with the school and society in general, and may be viewed as negative or destructive. Behavioral styles and models copied and imitated by young African-American males may serve them well in their environments, but are frequently viewed as dysfunctional by

the school and society.

Instructional programs must be developed and designed to enable young Black males to gain knowledge about appropriate interpersonal skills, and to employ this newly acquired knowledge in solving their social problems. In order for this goal to be accomplished, young Black males must be taught effective ways of internalizing their behaviors, and assessing how their behaviors affect others. Teaching appropriate social skills to young African-American males appears to be a promising technique for improving pro-social skills (Taylor, 1992). Appropriate social skills are essentials for developing personal relationships and accepting the roles of authority figures. Social behaviors are learned, therefore, they can be changed and modified. They require that an individual evaluate a situation, choose the appropriate social skills, and perform the social tasks appropriately (Katz, 1991). Unfortunately, many young African-American males have not been exposed to appropriate social models or do not possess enough prerequisite skills, such as maturity and self control, to successfully perform the social skills. Development of social skills in African-American males, as well as all children, require that they have appropriate models to copy and imitate, to recognize non-verbal clues and to adjust their behaviors accordingly. Many young African-American males have not mastered the above techniques (Taylor, 1992).

Several researchers, (Hillard 1989; Deal, 1990; Biklen, 1989; Taylor, 1992; Hatch, 1992; Forest, 1990; Collins, 1992; Kagon,

1980; Johnson, 1990), have directly or indirectly implied that social skills must be taught and integrated into the curriculum and assume a position of primacy along with the basic three R's. The African-American males class project was one attempt to address the special social and academic needs of African-American males. This project is one of several to be conducted jointly by Coppin State College and selected elementary schools in the Baltimore City Public Schools.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study was designed to determine if a structured program in social skills would improve academic and interpersonal skills and attendance of young African-American males.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The major purpose of the study was to determine if a structured program in social skills development could improve interpersonal and academic skills and attendance of young African-American males.

MAJOR HYPOTHESES

There will be a significant difference in academic and interpersonal skills of African American males after they have participated in a year long structured program in social skills development.

MINOR HYPOTHESES

1. There will be a significant difference in reading and math grades of African-American males after they have participated in a structured social skills program.
2. There will be a significant difference in attendance and referrals to the office of Africam-American males after they have participated in a structured social skills program.
3. There will be a significant difference in how parents and teachers perceive social skills development of African-American males after they have participated in the structure social skills program.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Sample

Boys selected to participate in this study were in grade 4. The total population of boys in this grade was used, with the exception of those boys with moderate to severe disabling conditions. Subjects were administered a pre-assessment inventory, before the intervention program was initiated, by teachers participating in the study. The inventory was not administered to determine who would be selected or rejected to participate in the study, rather it was administered to determine the types of social skills development needed by the boys.

Instrumentation

A pre-assessment inventory was constructed and administered to African-American males participating in the study. Results from the survey indicated a variety of social skills deficits such as multiple behavior problems, poor attendance, poor interpersonal skills, stress, poor organization and study skills, destructive and aggressive behaviors. These social skills deficits formed the bases for developing the structured social skills program for grouping the boys into various groups for remediating or eliminating the social skills deficit.

A student assessment profile was constructed to record attendance, office referral, reading and mathematics grades and social development of the boys by teachers involved in the program on a pre-post test basis.

A social skills check list was developed and administered to

the boys on a pre-post test basis. There were forty items in the checklist with a four point scale ranging from always (a lot, sometimes) to never. Total scores were computed for the instrument for each subject. Information in the checklist was derived from teachers' observations, the pre-assessment inventory, pursuing the professional literature and from parental interviews.

Intervention

African-American males who participated in this study were exposed to a year of structured social skills training. Activities included techniques for improving bonding, attention, belonging, recognition of their roles and positions in a group, developing confidence, motivation, caring, problem solving techniques, and other behavior problems. Teachers were instructed to model identified behaviors and to ascertain whether or not the boys understood or could imitate the behaviors.

The structured social skills learning program followed the listed format for each behavior taught:

1. Behaviors were written in behavioral terms.
2. The application of task analysis was followed until each skill was mastered before moving to the next skill.
3. Some classroom arrangements were necessary to accomplish some of the skills.
4. No specific time of the day was devoted to skill training, rather the training was infused into the regular curriculum whenever possible.
5. A reinforcement system was developed before the intervention was initiated.
6. Specific rules were developed for each skill with as much input from the boys as possible, and written in observable and measurable terms.

7. Rules were understood by the boys, that is, they were able to complete the task.

In selecting skills additional emphasis was placed on meeting the personal and social needs of the boys as perceived by them. Once the skills were selected, they were broken down into small manageable tasks (task analyses). New social skills were developed only when students had successfully transferred a prior skill.

Analysis of Data

Data were recorded on a student assessment profile. Sum totals for each of the measures in reading, math, attendance, office referrals and social skills development were used in analyzing the data. Several types of analyses were conducted including, descriptive statistics, "t" tests and the Kolmogorow-Smirnow Statistical Test. The Kolmogorow-Smirnow Test was performed to validate the "t" test results computed for reading and mathematical grades as well as to determine significant levels on other measures. Significant levels were set at the .05 level of confidence for all measures.

Results

Table I outlines the numbers and percentages of pre-post reading and mathematics grades of African-American males participating the study.

Table I

Frequency Analyses of Pre-Post Reading and Mathematics Grades
(N=33)

	Reading				Mathematics			
	Pre Reading		Post Reading		Pre Math		Post Math	
Grade	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Good	8	24	13	39	1	3	10	30
Satisfactory	14	42	18	54	12	36	14	36
Unsatisfactory	5	15	1	3.5	5	15	6	18
Fail	6	19	1	3.5	12	46	3	9
Total	33	100	33	100	33	100	33	100

Table I reveals that grades in reading and mathematics significantly improved between the two testing periods. There was a significant increase in "Good" grades for both reading and mathematics. The satisfactory categories in both measures showed the greatest gains. The unsatisfactory category showed a slight decrease for each measure; similarly, a decrease was noted in the number of failing grades received between the two testing periods.

Table II overviews the absences of the boys between the two testing periods.

Table II

Pre-Post Frequency Analyses of Days Absent (N=33)

Absences	Pre		Post	
	#	%	#	%
00=	6	18	11	33
01=	4	12	4	12
02=	3	9	3	9
03=	5	15.5	5	15.5
04=	5	15.5	3	9
05=	4	12	3	9
09=	3	9	1	3
10=	1	3	2	6.5
11=	1	3	1	3
13=	0	0	0	0
16=	1	3	0	0
20=	0	1	0	0
Total	33	100%	33	100%

It is evidentce from Table II that the structured social skills training program has a significant impact on attendance. Perfect attendance increased from 18% to 33% by the end of the year. Generally, boys showed a greater decrease in the number of days absent between the two recording periods. It should also be noted that there was a significant decrease in the number of lower days absent (13-20) between pre and post recordings.

The number of office referrals between the two recording periods are summarized in Table III.

Table III

Number and Percent of Office Referrals (N=32)

Number of Referrals	Pre		Post	
	#	%	#	%
0	29	90.5	31	97
1	2	6.5	1	3
2	1	3	0	0
Total	32	100%	32	100%

Table III contains the number of referrals between the two recording periods. Some differences can be seen between zero (0) referrals for the two periods. During the post period 31 (97%) of the boys were not referred to the office in comparison for 90.5 during the pre period. No boys were referred during the post period more than two times.

Table IV shows the means, standard deviations and "t" test results for reading and mathematical grades of African-American males participating the project.

Table IV

Means, Standard Deviations and T-Test Analyses for Reading and Mathematics Grades

	Pre-Analysis		Post Analysis		t. value	P
Measures	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Reading	3.85	1.004	4.49	1.176	5.60	>.001
Math	2.758	1.323	4.121	1.193	7.22	>.001

Inspection of Table IV clearly shows that significant differences occurred between the two periods in reading and mathematic grades. Significant level surpassed the .001 level of confidence. Data suggest that the structured social skills program had a significant impact on the reading and mathematics grades of the subjects. Thus, the hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant difference in reading and mathematics grades of African-American males after they had participated in a structured social skills program was supported beyond the .001 level of confidence.

The Komogorow-Smirnov Statistical Test was used to analyze the impact of the intervention on absences and office referrals, as well as to validate the "t" test results. Data are shown in Table V.

Table V

Means, Standard Deviations and Komogorow-Smirnov Analysis for Reading, Math, Absences and Office Referrals (N=33)

Measure	Pre-Measure				Post Measure			
	Mean	SD	K-S Value	P	Mean	SD	K-S Value	P
Reading	3.848	1.004	2.052	>.01	4.485	1.176	1.579	>.01
Mathematic	2.756	1.324	1.316	>.01	4.121	1.193	1.401	>.01
Absences	5.121	4.827	0.994	>.01	3.667	5.206	1.552	>.01
Office/Referrals	0.281	0.883	2.933	>.01	0.094	0.296	3.086	>.01

Results in Table V support the hypotheses which stated that there would be a significant difference in attendance and office referrals of American-American males after they had participated in a structured social skills program. All of the measures were significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. Data also support the "t" rest results reported in Table IV in the areas of reading and mathematics.

Perceptions of social skills development as reported by teachers and parents are reflected in Table VI.

Table VI

Means, Standard Deviations and Kolmogorow-Smirnov Analysis of Social Skills Development (N=33)

	Pre Social Skills				Post Social Skills			
Social Skills	Mean	SD	K-S Value	P	Mean	SD	K-S Value	P
Parent	87.048	7.553	0.8111	>.01	24.952	3.653	0.592	>.01
Teacher	81.821	13.024	0.6566	>.01	23.500	5.840	0.7633	>.01

Data in Table VI strongly suggest that significant differences exhibited in social skills development as reported by teachers and parents. Significant differences beyond the .01 level was reported for both groups (teachers and parents). Data supported one of the listed hypothesis which stated that parents and teachers would perceive social skills development of African-American males as positive after they have participated in a structured social skills program.

Significant differences reported in Tables IV-VI strongly supported the major hypothesis of this study. It was hypothesized that there will be a significant difference in academic and interpersonal skills of African-American males after they have participated in a year long structured program in social skills development. All measures in the aforementioned were significant beyond the .01 level of confidence.

Discussion

Generally, most of the African-American males in this study were pleased with their progress and voiced a concern to continue in the program. Both teachers and parents were pleased with the significant gains that students had made in improving their academic and interpersonal skills.

The study, based on the findings of this investigation implied that there is a vital need to intervene and teach social skills to African-American males at an early age. Data from this study tended to support the premise that deficits in social skills development can be compensated for African-American males if

systematic planning is conducted between the home and school.

In analyzing the statistical data in this study as to the project's effectiveness there is a need to proceed cautiously. The performance of the project students was perceived as positive by parents and teachers. These perceptions could have been bias to some extent, effecting the positive outcomes. Other deficiencies in the research design involved a failure to determine actual achievement in reading and mathematics, attitude toward school, length of time of the project school, and involvement in other experimental programs. Nevertheless, the project appeared to significantly change the negative and aggressive behaviors of the boys, expanded their self-images and increased grades in reading and mathematics. Improvement is needed if the program is to be strengthened, thus the following recommendations are made:

1. Guidelines for procedures used in identification and selection of participants should be improved;

2. Additional in-service training for parents and teachers are needed;

3. If the effectiveness of the program is to be improved, teachers, school staff and parents must plan together on regular intervals;

4. The total resources of the school must be used and integrated in order to bring about desired changes in behavior;

5. The study should be continued and infused through out the school;

6. Additional studies of this nature should be attempted in other schools to see if results of this study can be replicated;

7. Studies should be designed to follow up one the progress of the project boys over a span of three (3) to four (4) years to determine the long term effect of the structure social skills program on behavior.

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